



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

VOLUME I.

JANUARY, 1908.

NUMBER 1.

THE CALL TO THEOLOGY

FRANCIS GREENWOOD PEABODY

HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

The time may appear to many persons inopportune for the launching of a Journal of Theology. The tide of theological interest may seem to have ebbed so low as to leave no channel for such a venture; the profession of the ministry fails to win recruits; the queen of the sciences is deposed from her throne; critics are announcing the rout of the theological schools. The machinery of the churches, it is true, revolves with energy, but it does not seem to be geared into the wheels of the working world; and the deliberations of the theologians are frankly regarded by great numbers of people with indifference, if not with contempt. A distinguished railway president, on being informed that a promising youth had undertaken the study of theology, remarked, "Why does not so gifted a man devote himself to something that is real?"

This apparent turn of the tide is illustrated by the movement of higher education in the United States. Universities and colleges, whether maintained by the State or endowed by private means, have become detached, not only from theological supervision, but even from theological instruction. Faculties of theology are the exception rather than the rule in American universities. It is felt that theology is not only a difficult and divisive subject, but that it is not essential to the complete equipment of an institution of learning. "Let those who care for theology," it is said, "establish their denominational schools where they may have the advantage of an academic environment; the univer-

sity itself needs no school of theology to complete its circle of the sciences." The same reaction from theology is to be observed even among those who have been professionally trained as theologians. Education in medicine, law, and natural science, has been within one generation fundamentally revised to meet the new expansion of knowledge, but education for the ministry has for the most part remained unadjusted to the new world of learning. The requirement of the Hebrew language, for example, as a condition of ordination—or rather the requirement of so meagre a knowledge of the Hebrew language that not one student in ten can utilize it—still extorts from many students of theology in the United States from one-fourth to one-third of their years of professional education. As a consequence of this and similar survivals in the theological curriculum, many ministers of religion have found themselves trained in subjects which they cannot use, and ignorant of much which they need to know, and as they take up their work in the world are inclined to lay down their theology. They become administrators of congregations, organizers of ecclesiastical industries, philanthropists, pastors, but not theologians. Theology has presented itself to their minds as a record of controversies which were once living fires but are now extinct volcanoes, and they turn with a sense of relief to the fertile fields of modern life. The call of the time seems to them a call away from theology. They may even acquire a habit of mind quite distinct from that which characterizes a learned calling. Practitioners of law, medicine, or the natural sciences, are primarily and continuously students, unremittingly concerned to maintain the pace of intellectual progress, open-minded to each fresh discovery of truth. Practitioners of theology, on the other hand, often reserve little time for study, and may easily become disinclined to severe or logical thinking. Thus they may become faithful custodians of the oracles of God or skilful operatives in the work of the Church, and in either function may be workmen that need not be ashamed, but their attitude toward truth tends to detach them from the spirit of the modern world. A distinguished man of science, addressing, in 1906, the graduates of a technical school, said to them, "We old fellows have hard work to keep up with the advances of this generation in scientific theory and technical

practice, and we strain every nerve to maintain our place as *learners*." Then, as though contrasting this habit of mind with another, he proceeded to remark: "Authors, clergymen, women, and charitable workers, whose ideals of duty are in some respects unquestionably higher than those of the world, are in general strangely blind to the obligations of debt and contract. . . . Bankers do not like to deal with ladies or ministers or literary men." The scientific habit of mind, that is to say, according to this scholar, has its moral effect, and ministers, being less devoted to the method of science, become correspondingly less trustworthy in the ethics of daily life. However exaggerated such an indictment may be, it is not altogether without support in the habit and disposition of some ministers. It can hardly be maintained that the traits of intellectual honesty—precision, reserve of statement, the weighing of words—are as conspicuous in ministers as in men of science or men of affairs. At a convocation lately held of students from many theological schools the problems and ideals of the ministry were set forth for three days by selected advisers, and discussed by selected young men. The programme was rich in suggestions, both for the conduct of the devout life and for the direction of practical service, but throughout the session not one word was spoken either by old or young which concerned the minister as a thinker, or the duties of theological students as students of theology. Feeling and action had crowded out of the foreground of interest the function of thought. Piety and efficiency seemed sufficient substitutes for intellectual power. The passion for service had supplanted the passion for truth. A very competent critic of preaching, addressing an assemblage of preachers in Boston, is said to have told them with characteristic candor that their work was marked by "intellectual frugality." The same indictment has been brought by a distinguished representative of the Church of England against his own communion. "The real security of the Church," said the Bishop of Birmingham, "lies in giving full scope to the scholar's gift, and the reason why many thoughtful people do not find spiritual advantage in listening to preachers is that the preaching gives them little to think about." A supply of priests, in other words, cannot make good a lack of prophets. The church as altar or workshop cannot supplant the

church as interpreter and preacher. A time when people in an unprecedented degree are thinking can be guided by those only who can think straight and can report their thought with power. At such a time the words of Phillips Brooks, which to many readers once seemed exaggerated, become words of sober warning, "In many respects an ignorant clergy, however pious it may be, is worse than none at all."

If, then, these signs of a reaction from theology are unmistakable, what is the dilemma which confronts the Christian Church? Either it must frankly retreat from the pretence of leadership under the conditions of the present age, or it must become a more efficient organ of rational and candid thought. Not less of religious fervor and not less of practical activity are demanded of the representatives of religion, but a new accession of intellectual power, the capacity to translate the message of the Timeless into the dialect of the present age. The specialization of knowledge has prescribed to the minister of religion a definite sphere, and no amount of hastily acquired information about politics or economics or social reform can atone for the abandonment of his own province. On other subjects others are better trained than he, and may listen to his counsel with compassion, if not with contempt. If he gives up thinking about religion, he gives up his place in a learned profession. He may continue to be a devoted priest, an efficient administrator, a devout soul, but the direction of the mind of the age is transferred to other hands. In 1729, William Law, the English mystic, published his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*, a summons to piety which touched experiences as remote from each other as those of Samuel Johnson and John Wesley. The same call of the mystic to the practice of the presence of God should be heard by the present age, and in the whirlwind and fire and earthquake of the time many a heart listens for this still small voice of the spirit. Under the new conditions of the modern world, however, its resistless movement of inquiry, its universal cultivation of the scientific method, its complete abandonment of obscurantism and ambiguity, a new and not less serious call is heard to devout and holy thinking. The future of organized religion will depend, not alone on new expressions of piety and new enlistments for service, but — in an unprecedented

degree—on a revival, among those who represent religion, of intellectual authority and leadership.

There are several further considerations which reinforce this call of the time and add to its imperativeness. In the first place, it must be remembered that any one who thinks about religion theologizes, whether he will or no. Theology may appear to him a dreary record of profitless controversies, from which he turns to a self-originated, contemporary, up-to-date religion, with its material in the events of the day or the witness of personal experience. "Yourself," said Emerson, "a new-born bard of the Holy Ghost, cast behind you all conformity, and acquaint men at first-hand with Deity." It is a natural reaction in the rhythm of progress. Dogmatism begets mysticism; literalism swings over into transcendentalism. In neither case, however, is there an escape from theology. The theology of supernaturalism is simply supplanted by the theology of naturalism. "When me they fly," theology may say with Emerson, "I am the wings." Tauler, Madame Guyon, and Schleiermacher are as legitimately to be reckoned among the theologians as Cyprian and Thomas Aquinas. The only refuge from theology is to stop thinking about religion, and that is impossible except to one who stops thinking altogether. The only alternatives are those of a molluscos theology and a vertebrated theology; a theology which is all foreground, like a Chinese plate where the man is larger than the house from which he comes, and a theology which has perspective, background, and relations.

In the second place, there should be recalled the coincidence which has occurred at many points in history of a revival of theology with a revival of religion. It has indeed not infrequently happened that a wave of religious feeling has been set in motion by unlearned preachers like Bunyan or Moody; but it cannot be inferred from such stirrings of the spirit that religious zeal is naturally repressed by learning or fostered by ignorance. The epochs of Christian history which have most indelibly marked its religious life have been at the same time epochs in the history of theology. The Confessions of Augustine, the Meditations of Anselm, the Simple Method how to Pray, of Luther, the *Monologen* of Schleiermacher—these manuals of the devout life are the

by-products of theologians. None but theologians could have created these epochs in the history of piety, and none but pious souls could have created the coincident epochs in the history of theology. Protestantism, Methodism, and Tractarianism were movements of religious vitality, but they began within the precincts of universities. It is suicidal to anticipate a revival of religion which shall be dissociated from a revival of theology. The only practicable choice is between a theology which gives chains and a theology which gives wings.

The call to theology is, further, heard in more personal experiences. Many a minister of religion would gladly testify to the tonic effect upon his spiritual power of intimacy with the mind of a master; the chastening discipline of acquaintance with great teachers or great thoughts. It is not essential to this exhilaration that the teaching should be accepted; it is the intellectual friction which sustains the momentum of his own thought. Not tolerance only, but the expansion of one's own convictions, comes of ascending with a trained guide to the heights of thought where one surveys the broad horizon of truth. No preacher is safe from spiritual atrophy who does not habitually exercise himself in these intellectual athletics of his profession. I have known a Protestant rationalist whose thought and style were enriched by the study of Cardinal Newman; another who prepared himself for worship by companionship with the mediæval mystics; and still another who sharpened his mind each week on the whetstone of Calvin. One of the most impressive facts in the biography of James Martineau is his determination, at the age of forty, to withdraw from his distinguished career as preacher and, even thus tardily, betake himself to Germany, where he might establish first-hand relations with the masters of philosophical idealism. From this point a new note of authority and a new sweep of insight are at his command, and the lyric strain of his earlier teaching is steadied and broadened by new companionships. No disclosure in the biography of Phillips Brooks is more instructive than the intellectual momentum which this prophet of modern life acquired through a study of the ante-Nicene Fathers of the Church. Historical research, far from diminishing his passionate devotion to contemporary religion, broadened and clarified his

view; and his gift of sympathy with types of thought and worship remote from his own was, if not acquired, at least confirmed, by his intimacy with Tertullian and Origen.

A further aspect of the call to theology is its promotion of co-operation between the teachers and the preachers of religion. The Devil, it has been said, laughs at a divided Church. It must be not less amusing to him to see the skirmish-line of theology advancing to new attacks of inquiry while the commanders of ecclesiasticism retreat to the breastworks of the past. This alienation between the conduct of pastoral life and the teaching of theological science may be observed in all countries. New sources of knowledge, new methods of criticism, new material for investigation, have given new vitality and fascination to the study of theology; but if free inquiry is to be met by anything less than appreciation and confidence, then religion cannot expect to hold the loyalty of educated men. If professional preferment or popularity be reserved for those whose minds are closed and denied to those whose minds are open, there must follow the decadence of the ministry and the paralysis of the Church. If industry and candor are less available as passports to eminence than conformity and reticence, then the Church is doomed to obscurantism and provincialism. Nothing repels the best minds from the service of religion more sternly than this sense of a schism between its science and its art. What Samuel Adams said of the American colonies is true of the ministers of religion in their relation to the teachers of theology: if they do not hang together, they will hang separately. The only permanent cure for wrong thinking is right thinking. The only way out of bad theology is through good theology. Either the theologians must lead the Church, or the Church must cease to lead the world. Religion must either hear the call to theology: or must content itself with becoming a function of the State, or a refuge for sick souls.

Finally, as one thus reviews the signs of the times which call to theology, he observes that it is a call which in many countries and many forms is being heard and obeyed. The first impression which one receives of a prevailing indifference to theology is not a just impression. On the contrary, the signs of a new concern for

the rational interpretation of religion are so many that they appear to be the premonitions of a genuine renaissance. The Roman Catholic Church is at this moment stirred by an agitation of free inquiry whose consequences may be as momentous as those of the Protestant Reformation; and this theological movement, represented by the Abbé Loisy, Senator Fogazzaro, and Father Tyrrell, is not likely to be checked by the reproach of Modernism. A great Church, as one critic has remarked, cannot maintain itself on the principle that there is no such thing as history. Either within the Catholic Church, or—in the language of the last Encyclical—“as the synthesis of all heresies,” a revision of Catholic theology seems destined to occur. A similar call to serious thinking is heard, among the noises of ecclesiastical politics, both in France and Great Britain. The collisions of State with Church, by the very violence of their friction, are striking out new conceptions of the nature and province of religion, and giving new momentum to theological progress. The “New Theology” of the English nonconformists, even if it be neither wholly new nor wholly theological, is at least a brave and candid search for a rational basis of religious experience. The scientific temper, long alienated from theology, is returning to the perennially absorbing problems of faith, as in the suggestive catechism of Sir Oliver Lodge. In every communion of churches the younger clergy are eagerly reconsidering the foundations of belief, testing the flexibility of creeds, and extending the radius of intellectual liberty. It is a propitious time to begin a *Journal of Theology*. The period of indifference seems approaching its close, and an era of promise for theology seems to be at hand. In one of the most notable of modern German books on the beginnings of Christianity, Professor Wernle remarks, with playful exaggeration, that among other characteristics of the work of Jesus Christ he came to save men from the theologians. It is a just discrimination of his teaching from the theological method of the scribes; but it is a most inadequate definition of the purpose of Jesus. He came, in fact, not to destroy theology, but to fulfil it. He gave new scope and significance to the thought of God, to the nature of man, and to the destiny of the soul and of the world. He would have been reckoned among the world’s great theologians if other endowments had not given

him a higher title. He came not to save men from the theologians, but to save the theologians themselves. It is the same today. The traditional, external, and formal theology of the scribes speaks in a language which the present age does not understand, but the theology of Jesus Christ has the perennial authority of spiritual insight and habitual communion with the Eternal. The message of the gospel is not one of salvation from the theologians, nor even one of salvation for the theologians, but a message which, in its interpretation of the nature of God and of man, must be delivered by the theologians to the mind of the modern world.